

By Lisa Armony, Contributing Writer

Two Orange County elected officials have joined calls for administrators at the University of California, Irvine (UCI) to act decisively against students involved in provocative, anti-Israel activity.

In separate letters to UCI Chancellor Michael Drake, **Rep. John Campbell (R-Calif.)** and state Assemblyman Chuck DeVore (R-Irvine) called for strict discipline against students for repeated heckling of Michael Oren, Israel's ambassador to the United States, during a Feb. 8 speech at the Student Center. Eight UCI students, including the president of the UCI's Muslim Student Union (MSU), were arrested and charged with violating the university's student code of conduct.

In a Feb. 26 letter to UCI Chancellor Michael Drake, **Rep. John Campbell (R-Calif.)** urged full disciplinary action be taken against those students responsible for the incident, describing their behavior as "

egregious

" and "

intolerable

." He also called for an investigation into the conduct and membership of the MSU.

"This is not the first time the MSU has been involved in violations of free speech, intimidation, and, at the very least, threats of violence on campus. Sadly, this is becoming a pattern, and one which is especially troubling, as the chosen rhetoric of this group incites hate and violence against both this country and Jewish-American students on campus," Campbell wrote.

Muslim students and their defenders claim they were exercising their right to free speech when they interrupted Oren with shouts like "You are an accomplice to genocide" a total of 10 times before dozens of students boisterously left the ballroom to stage a demonstration outside. Experts, including UCI Law School Dean Erwin Chemerinsky and civil liberties scholar Nat Hentoff, maintain that the students' actions are not protected under the First Amendment.

Campbell, whose district includes Irvine and southern Orange County, came under heavy criticism by the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA) in January for his alleged silence in the face of continued Israel bashing and alleged illegal activities by the MSU. The New-York based ZOA said it continuously apprised **Campbell** of the MSU's provocative conduct,

including the possibility that MSU had engaged in fundraising for the terrorist group Hamas during an on-campus event in May 2009, and was disappointed that

Campbell

had taken no action in response to these reports.

"This has been a topic of concern, and **Congressman Campbell** has spoken verbally with Chancellor Drake about this issue in the past, but clearly a pattern has developed, and the Muslim Student Union's actions are getting worse not better," Brent S. Hall, Campbell's communications director, said Monday. In his letter,

Campbell

admonished UCI administrators for giving the MSU a

"greater degree of leeway"

than it has given to other groups on campus.

DeVore's Feb. 23 letter calls on Drake to ban the MSU as "an entity inimical to the University's imperative to provide an education in an atmosphere of academic liberty, free of coercion and conducive to meaningful debate and free inquiry."

The assemblyman said he recognized this step to be a "severe and enduring penalty," but that the MSU's dedication "to support of terrorism, anti-Semitism and the suppression of free speech" warranted such a response.

Representatives for **Campbell** and DeVore said neither official has yet to hear back from Drake on this matter.

UCI spokeswoman Cathy Lawhon said that university officials will not comment on community reactions to the Feb. 8 incident while they are engaged in a confidential disciplinary process, though they are not surprised by the strong response, which also includes letters in support of the students from the Muslim and "free speech" communities calling for the charges to be dropped. Lawhon could not comment on the status of the disciplinary process, which she said could last six weeks or longer, citing the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act. A report in the Orange County Register quoted MSU President Mohamed Abdelgany as saying that he believes sanctions could be as serious as suspension or expulsion.